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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 001004

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP, AND DRL  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR FOR JAMES RUDE

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [KMPI](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: FOREIGN WORKERS ENGAGE IN VIOLENT PROTEST

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Low-skilled workers from India and Nepal employed by a Muscat-area cleaning company recently protested over alleged contract violations and poor living conditions in the company-owned and operated housing compound. The workers created a disturbance, and Omani security forces reportedly used severe measures to disband the workers. Ten Indian employees of the company are in prison and likely will be deported. The Omani Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has not yet specified whether it will investigate the workers' claims or what actions it may take against the company. Post is coordinating with the Indian Embassy, which has raised this issue with the Minister of Manpower, on appropriate engagement with the Omani government. End Summary.

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The Events at the Labor Camp  
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¶2. (C) A protest on October 21 by expatriate workers employed by the cleaning company "Al Nabha" reportedly degenerated into violence and physical clashes between the workers and company supervisors. The Royal Oman Police (ROP), and possibly other security forces, were called in to quell the violence. (Note: Questions remain about the degree of violence which resulted.) Contacts stated that by 11:00 p.m. on the 21st, approximately 500-600 Nepalese and Indian workers gathered in front of the supervisors' quarters in the company's Muscat-area housing compound (locally known as a "labor camp") to voice long-running complaints about non-payment of wages, other contract violations, and poor living conditions in the camp.

¶3. (C) The Director General of Labor Care at the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Saleh Alamri, claimed that the company informed him of the protest at 11:30 p.m. and that he went to the camp to try to mediate the dispute. He said that by the time he arrived, workers were growing increasingly angry, specifically over the company's alleged unwillingness to explain or rectify recurring paycheck deductions that were not part of the workers' contracts. Worker anger eventually boiled over into violence; there are conflicting reports about the extent of the violence or damage to company property. Alamri stated that a small group of Indian workers among the protesters, whom he described as "drunk," initiated violent acts by agitating the crowd against the camp's supervisors. The violence quickly spiraled out of control, he said, with workers destroying company vehicles. Contacts at the Indian Embassy - including the Indian Chief of Mission (COM) who spoke personally with the Ambassador about the events - claimed that the workers, although extremely agitated, did not do major damage to the compound, but broke

only one plate glass window in a company office.

¶4. (C) According to multiple contacts, forces from Oman's security services - most likely the ROP - arrived at the labor camp sometime after midnight and moved aggressively to disband the protest. Officials in the Indian Embassy, as well as Indian laborers in neighboring labor camps, alleged that the ROP beat workers indiscriminately, pursuing protesters into their dormitories and swinging batons at anyone they found there. One contact claimed that some al Nabha workers showed him marks on their bodies from the beatings. The Indian COM told the Ambassador that several of the ten workers now in police custody have multiple and, in some cases, severe injuries.

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Background to Worker Complaints  
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¶5. (C) A local Catholic priest, the majority of whose parishioners live and work in Muscat-area labor camps including Al Nabha's, told poloff that it was well known that conditions at the camp were poor. According to an Indian diplomat, Al Nabha was paying its workers 35 Omani Riyal (OR) -- approximately USD 91 -- per month, 15 OR less than the minimum rate for low-skilled workers set by the Indian Embassy. The diplomat said that his embassy never saw the employees' contracts despite an understanding worked out with the Ministry of Manpower and the ROP that allows the Indian mission to review and approve contracts before letting Indian nationals enter Oman for work. The Indian COM stated that the protest occurred because the company's accountant was making unspecified monthly deductions from the workers' already low salaries. MOM official Alamri confirmed to poloff that the company's salaries were extremely low, and

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stated that the alleged monthly deductions amounted to abridgments of worker contracts in violation of Oman's 2003 Labor Law.

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Outcomes  
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¶6. (C) The Indian COM told the Ambassador that as of October 29, ten Indian workers remain in police custody although no charges have been brought against them. He said this is a point of major concern for the Indian government and that Vayalar Ravi, the Indian Minister for Overseas Affairs who was in Oman last week on an official visit regarding labor issues, specifically raised the protest and the Omani response with Minister of Manpower Juma bin Ali al-Juma. According to the Indian COM, Juma responded "we have to keep (these workers in prison) as an example." While Juma promised the Indians that the MOM was considering disciplinary action against Al Nabha for possible contract violations, the Indian COM said that Juma was not specific about what action might be taken. Alamri informed poloff that the company wants to pursue a criminal case against the workers for damage to company property, but that the MOM is advocating for the workers' release and repatriation. The Indian COM told the Ambassador that he expects the workers may be deported as soon as October 30.

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) In responding to this protest, the Omani government has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the welfare of expatriate workers and to investigate allegations of labor exploitation seriously. However, the allegedly excessive police response, and the MOM's unclear intent to investigate allegations of company malfeasance, calls its resolve into question. The Ambassador told the Indian COM

that the Embassy is prepared to raise this issue with the Omani government as part of our anti-TIP activities, but does not want to interfere with the Indian government's efforts to protect its nationals. The Indian COM said that he would take the Ambassador's offer into consideration. In the meantime, Post intends to closely follow the Omani government's continued actions on this matter.

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